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ABSTRACT

Explaining that interest in law magnet programs has grown substantially in the 1990s, this ERIC digest analyzes these programs on the basis of information provided by 24 mostly urban magnet schools. The digest places law magnet programs within the broader context of law-related education (LRE). The primary purpose of law magnet programs is to prepare students for citizenship, although many students choose magnet schools because they are interested in pursuing careers in law-related professions. Pointing out that these programs have been successful, the digest encourages the establishment of new law magnet programs and provides information on getting programs started. (LH)

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Law Magnet Programs

by Paula A. Nessel

Interest in law magnet programs has grown substantially in the 1990s. In 1992, a survey of law magnets identified 69 programs in 15 states. This report summarizes information provided by 24 predominantly urban law magnet programs that responded to a 1994 survey. The schools in the sample represent the spectrum of sizes, organizational structures, and settings.

Definition and Origin. A law magnet program is a comprehensive program offering multiple classes concentrating on various aspects of the law and legal process. The law magnet programs utilize an interdisciplinary approach to integrate and emphasize legal studies throughout the curriculum. Programs usually include a sequence of elective and non-elective classes in grades 9-12. Some elementary and middle schools offer law magnet programs. While many law magnet programs originated as a means to desegregate schools, some were created because the community, the school administration, and local teachers wanted to offer students the unique enrichment that a law-related education curriculum could provide.

Law magnet programs conform to the stipulation by the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights that magnet schools offer innovative instructional approaches to attract students with various racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds. Such approaches might include educational programs and services that comprise the mission of an entire school while others might serve as supplementary enrichment to a standard curriculum. The emphasis on attracting students of different backgrounds reflects the racial integration goal many magnet programs were created to fulfill.

Numerous magnet schools throughout the nation were created in response to a Kansas City, Missouri legal case in the late 1970s. At that time, Kalima Jenkins and several other African-American students successfully sued the school district for not moving "with all deliberate speed" to dismantle racial segregation in its system, as required by *Brown v. Board of Education* (1955). This case is known as *Brown II* because it came to the Supreme Court one year after the original *Brown* decision in order to resolve the issue of how to implement the ruling of *Brown I*. Kalima Jenkins' case led to federal court supervision of the district's desegregation plans. Magnet schools were among the remedies initiated to remove vestiges of racial segregation.

Relationship to the Field of Law-Related Education. Law magnet programs are a small but significant part of the broader field of law-related education (LRE). In 1978 the Law-Related Education Act defined LRE as "education to equip nonlawyers with knowledge and skills pertaining to the law, the legal process, and the legal system, and the fundamental principles and values on which these are based."

There are national, state, and local LRE programs. The degree of the institutionalization of LRE in the school or district varies greatly. Sometimes LRE is brought to classrooms through the initiative of innovative teachers who act without institutional support. But LRE can also be organized as a district-wide program, usually through infusion into the curriculum from kindergarten through high school. Law magnet programs are examples of LRE at the most comprehensive end of the continuum. In them, developing an understanding of the law and exploring careers in the legal professions permeate the formal and informal curriculum. Although many students choose magnet schools because they are interested in pursuing careers in law-related professions, the primary purpose of these schools is to prepare students for citizenship.

Student Profile. Whether or not court-ordered desegregation caused their creation, most law magnet programs have racially and ethnically diverse student populations. A percentage breakdown of student populations reveals the following averages: African American--51%, Asian American--3%, Caucasian--30%, Mexican American or Hispanic--15%, and Native American--.2%. Only about 40% of the responding programs indicate that three-fourths or more of their student body is comprised of only one of the above groups. More often, the student populations include two or three ethnic or racial categories.

Another interesting aspect of the law magnet student population is the gender balance. Twenty-two out of 24 responding schools report a majority of female students. One inner city school reports that over 90% of the students are female. Only one school reports a male majority. Within the high school setting, the size of the law magnet program can be large, with an enrollment of 100-240 students. Smaller programs may have 25-100 students.

School Profile. More than half of the programs surveyed were created in the 1990s, while about 20% began in the late 1980s and another 20% began before 1985. Many programs combine the study of law with the study of a related field, such as public affairs/policy, business, criminal justice, finance, international studies, military science, law enforcement, public/community service, and government; the latter two are most common. Most law magnet programs are located in large metropolitan areas. In 1996, for example, the boroughs of New York City included 71 law magnet programs.

Funding. Most programs have county or local funds plus at least one other funding source. More than half indicate state or federal funds. A few report court-mandated funding. Community groups and businesses and corporations provide other sources of funding.

Harry Garvin, Legal Coordinator of a program in Savannah, Georgia, is one good example of an effective fundraiser. Garvin has received funding from various sources by seeking lists of educational grantors from the United States Department of Education, Department of Commerce, and state department of education. Mr. Garvin also contacts the Georgia state departments of industry and tourism to request an annual list of major industries moving to his state. He believes that a new company is more inclined than an established one to provide funds because it probably has not yet been approached by many local charitable organizations. Being new to a community provides a strong incentive to seek favorable publicity. Dr. Garvin has received in-kind donations from local

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cable companies, television stations, telephone and cellular phone companies, computer/software companies, and military bases.

Community Support. LRE has always emphasized the use of community resources to make the learning process relevant, experiential, and interactive. Law magnet programs depend on their communities for support, most often using members of the law-enforcement community and the court system. Local bar associations, law schools, and undergraduate schools or community colleges with criminal justice courses can also offer assistance. State bar associations, state LRE projects, individual attorneys, and law firms provide additional support.

Course Offerings. The most common types of courses offered are United States history, civic education, global issues, world history, constitutional law, local/state government, and federal government. A wide variety of other courses are sometimes offered, such as business law, forensic science, international law, court interpreting, criminal justice, law enforcement, law and literature, mediation, and trial advocacy and tactics. Law magnet programs offer a spectrum of educational options ranging from vocational training to college preparation. While the programs include some form of career education, they share the underlying goal of instilling in their students an interest in and understanding of the law.

Law magnet programs emphasize active learning opportunities. Most programs include mock trials, community service, and internships. Survey respondents indicate that mediation is a component of more than 80% of the programs. Mentor programs are used by almost 75%. Many programs include trips to law-related settings, especially the courts.

Getting Started. Immediately after the decision is made to create a law magnet program, an advisory board should be formed. The members should number 10-20 and include representatives from the police, the judiciary, law schools, the state legislature, community colleges, local law firms, local and state bar associations, the district attorney's office, and legal secretaries. Recognizable names help the image of the program, and a list of the advisory board members should appear on the program's letterhead stationery. The most intensive work of the advisory board occurs in the formative stage of the law magnet program, but continued participation is vital to the maintenance and development of each program. Board members provide advice and resources through their connections to the community. They open doors to financial and in-kind support and recruit law-related professionals to serve as consultants, mentors to students, and teachers for law magnet programs.

Inservice training for teachers is widely available. Many national and state LRE centers and projects schedule professional development conferences and annual summer institutes for teachers. They also develop curricula and instructional materials, including videotapes and software. For more information about teacher training, contact the National Law-Related Education Resource Center of the American Bar Association.

Finally, contacting existing magnet programs can assist groups in shaping the direction of their own new programs. Site visits provide concrete examples of how programs can be structured as well as personal opportunities for answering questions.

Conclusion. By early 1996, the number of known law magnet programs had grown to more than 100 in 17 states. These programs provide interesting and practical courses for their students. While exploration of law-related careers may be a focus, the opportunities offered in these programs equip students to be informed, engaged citizens. The success of these programs warrants wide replication to ensure that more young people learn the importance of understanding and participating in our constitutional democracy.

For a list of law magnet programs and other information about all aspects of law-related education, contact the National Law-Related Education Resource Center, American Bar Association/Youth Education, 541 N. Fairbanks Court, Chicago, IL 60611-3314; telephone: (312) 988-5735; e-mail: pnessel@staff.abanet.org.

References and ERIC Resources. The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia 22153-2852; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1400 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most larger libraries by using the information provided or requested through Interlibrary Loan.

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